






# The steps of probate

The purpose of the probate process is to confirm and carry out the decedent’s final wishes as described in their last will and testament. Here’s a brief overview of the probate process.

	Step	Timeframe
	<b>1</b> The executor of the decedent’s estate initiates the probate process by filing the person’s last will and testament with the probate court in their state of residence.	1–4 months
	<b>2</b> The executor works with the probate court to complete an inventory of all the decedent’s assets and to determine their total value.	6–12 months
	<b>3</b> The executor works with the court to resolve and pay any outstanding debts and taxes.	3–12 months
	<b>4</b> The probate court confirms that the executor has discharged their duties appropriately and provides a final ruling on the division and distribution of assets to beneficiaries.	9–24 months
	<b>5</b> The executor makes the final distribution of the assets according to the terms of the deceased’s will.	9–18 months

## Things to note about the probate process

- **The steps in the probate process vary from state to state.** Some states have sub-steps associated with each step in the probate process. In others, the steps are much more abbreviated.
- **The probate process can take anywhere from months to years.** It depends largely on the complexity of the decedent’s estate, whether anyone is contesting the estate, whether there’s a last will and testament, and the state’s probate laws.
- **Some states offer a faster, less-expensive probate option** for estates that are below a certain value. In these cases, beneficiaries may claim assets using alternative legal actions, including a small estate affidavit.

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